

Framing paper for 'Still Open'

Presentation by Ellen Kilsgaard
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'It is an extraordinary round: what you give, that is to say yourself, your life, what you deposit in the other, is returned to you immediately by the other. The other constitutes a source. You are not your own source in this case. And as a result, you receive your life, which you do not receive from yourself.' (Cixous 1997: 37)

Introduction

I will here outline some questions and concerns I have around my practice and I will try to explain and clarify some of which has arisen through asking these questions through practice.

The processes I am investigating are pivoting around 'embodied communication', which takes place in an interface between 'I' and 'you'. Embodied here meaning the site of complex interplay taking place in the sentient psycho-physical body-mind. The foundational assumption I am working with is the notion that the way we move, the way we place ourselves in relation to the world, the way we perceive the world around us and other people in it, is the way we think. Thus it is through a moving/thinking/perceiving body, which by nature is relational, that I seek to investigate communication. BMC practitioner Trude Cone defines communication:

'Communication takes place when I can see what I send out is understood.'
(Trude Cone workshop Helsinki February 2009)

Or perhaps: when I experience that what I send out resonating in the other.

I am experimenting with how much information we can sense or receive from each other, how this information passes between us and how the processing of this information might come to have dynamic and qualitative expression. I am questioning how an embodied communication may become performance or whether it is an *approach* to make performance, or both. I try calling the work: embodied connectivity in multiple directions as once.

I experiment with how the event of meetings and non-meetings may be the instances that determine spatial patterns and energetic dynamics. (Whatever dynamics, emotions or ‘games’ arise I consider them having an artistic potential. Also conflicts, clashes and misunderstandings I find very potent in this context.)

I think of these ‘meetings’ as for example the meeting of a magnifying glass and the sun. There is a series of different elements which align, something dry, someone to hold the magnifying glass and a building up of intensity, a focusing of heat through the glass, there is a ‘tipping point’ and a fire starts. Catching fire is the *instance* of the meeting. The fire itself is what you see as the material.

I might think of the work as a study of how ‘catch fire’ and an exploration of different kinds of fire.

A phenomena that surprises and startles us in each session we have had together, and which might relate to the catching of fire, is *laughter*. It is not because someone tells a joke and not because we do silly things. I think perhaps it is because we have glimpses of co-existence. Adrian Heathfield explains:

‘The laughter evades explanation, narration, reason itself. It holds out, not simply contradiction, but the sudden reversal and/or annihilation of value: it opens the possibility of the integration of coexistence of opposites.’
(Heathfield 2004: 61)

He continues to explain that laughter is:

‘...an indeterminate and irrepressible force, which momentarily consumes its witness, causing in them a joyous, convulsive and physical opening to the unknown.’ (Heathfield 2004: 61)

This moment of a ‘physical opening to the un-known’ might be experienced as being lost, but through humour it becomes an *opening*. Perhaps it is so that in glimpses of co-existence we are faced with a vast un-known, what we know about our selves and our social structures collapses and ‘...ruptures system of exchange...’ and we are

propelled into the 'interface'. To cope, or in recognition of our own relativity we laugh. Maybe.

The laughter we experience when dancing together might be moments of co-existence, moments where we at once embodied and critically collapse our binary position towards each other and open a space between us.

The laughter cannot be faked, it happens. In an instance beyond our individual control we are engulfed in a happening. It is something we might prepare ourselves for but never make happen, it happens to us. This is how I would like to think of the unfolding of the work.

The state the work is at, at the moment is that of emerging research. It does not take the form of a packaged performance but a process, a way of being together, which as we work continually unfolds and presents us with new insights and questions.

As much as the process is impartial and unfinished this paper is unfinished and impartial and serves as an exercise of mapping and supporting my process, as a way of giving it context and a frame. Any division of 'areas' are fictional and serve only as clarification and as a help to gain some kind of overview. They are all closely interconnected and integrated. However for the time being I have divided my inquiry into three sections:

A critical body

Training

Dynamics between bodies

A critical body

I am interested in an alignment and play, an embodied critique' within the person who dances, 'embodied critique' being moments where things shift, where the fire catches, or of laughter perhaps.

I am interested in seeing moments of ‘danger’. Or perhaps: moments where the performers are not in control individually but in relationship with something other, an-other, what happens is therefore un-predictable.

I am interested in the un-predictable.

I am interested in dance as a genuine attention to what is there, just that, what comes into attention, and how that might instigate an impulse for moving and doing.

I am interested in the willingness to be available to what there is and in what might be produced through rigorous attention through the sensate, 3 dimensional spatial body.

I would like to unpack a little what I mean with the sensate 3 dimensional spatial body?

I am coming to understand that I am dealing with an alignment of:

- The physical state and physical abilities in general
- An energy-body, which I understand to reach way beyond the visible
- Feelings, emotions and memories, which I understand to constitute another kind of ‘body’
- A thought body or mental body

I am separating four ‘bodies’, which are deeply interconnected, and there will surely be many more layers to separate. But for the moment this serves well for my own clarification. They are aspects of the body I experience while dancing, different layers to draw from, different ways of creating impulses and meaning. I understand the dance as a practice of establishing a flexibility in relation to these different perspectives, or colourings, one could take on ones being/action. Practicing this flexibility could perhaps be called ‘play’ or ‘dance’.

Through this work it is clear for me that ‘play’ means establishing an instant flexibility and total availability towards the now, here, to allow for re-organisation of a situation to take place. Thus through an economics of flexibility in relation to many different aspects of ‘me’, what might be taken for granted, will paradoxically re-configure and align, shift, spin, align and I think come to dance. In this way dance is a critical act.

Etymologically Paradox means: paradoxon ‘contrary (opinion),’ para- ‘distinct from’ + doxa ‘opinion.’ (Dictionary, mac. Version 10.4.11)

The training

How to tune our bodies in ways which makes us available and ready and which allows paradoxes within us to swing?

In relation to this work I am questioning what I actually train as a dancer/performer and why. It is becoming clear to me that training is a way of becoming intimate with my body and to understand how my whole system can be available to me, how I might activate and circulating energy in the system. And to understand how I can connect with others and what is around me through becoming intimate with my own system.

I have been searching for physicalities that work as ‘openers’, for at tonus and focus points in the body that ‘gives space’ and thus gives way for movement:

I am working on understanding what these ‘openers’ might be.

Dynamics between bodies

How to create conditions for ambiguous alignments / paradoxical things, to emerge and disappear? How to catch fire?

Founded on the notion of a critical body I am investigating what the dynamic of difference between us might produce: looking at a social act distilled into intensities, patterns, dynamics; movement.

I am interested in setting a ground, a framework, which allows un-predictability to take momentum and take us by surprise. (When I say ‘us’ it is dancer Sheena MacGrandles and myself at the moment, but I believe it travels to people watching as well.)

I am working with negotiation or exchange, as a dynamic, which also holds an aesthetic, aesthetic as the skin of a happening vibrating and glowing and becoming visible. I am interested in the aesthetic expression of negotiation or exchange or dialogue or conversation or engagement with difference: the production, which takes place in the interface between us.

I consider the structures and forms that might arise from the work to be patterns, rhythms and intensities, which are produced through our engagement with an-other.

David Williams asks:

‘How might one interact with another whose difference is recognised as an active event, rather than a failure of plenitude? What are the *productive* qualities of alterity? In what ways might one work (in) an existential in-between and perceive other-wise?’ (Williams 2004: 59, emphasis in original)

Williams proposes that practice, which questions and engages with another is an ethical and deeply critical practice that might hold ‘productive qualities’. The question of ethics is the fundamental driving force of this practice.

At this point there are no macro structures, as in rules or scores or predetermined movement. We have worked on a series of specific focus points, or exercises, which we may draw on but the work at this point is a set of micro-structures that form through the act of relating, reading each other/receiving impulses, responding and playing together.

The exchange we experience is sometimes slow and sometimes might speed up. It can be understood as: I give an impulse, (for example a thought, projection of energy, physical movement) then you respond. Or reverse.

At a fast speed it might be: an aligned event in the relational interface between us. Or in other words: sometimes the exchange happens at such a fast pace that it becomes a vibration of its own in the middle, radiating back out to all of us. That is more rare.

Through embodiment, when we are ready to receive impulses from the outside and are in intimate contact with our selves, the exchange between us is something that

takes hold of our bodies and moves us. This movement obliges us to surrender our standpoint, our selves and become, become fluid. Lyotard talks of this moment, this fire, as ‘something happening’:

‘That something happens, the occurrence, means the mind is disappropriated. The expression ‘it happens that...’ is the formula of non-mastery of self over self. The event makes the self incapable of taking possession and control of what it is. It testifies that the self is essentially passable to a recurrent alterity’ (Lyotard 1991: 59. Emphasis original)

Our lives or perceptions and identities, come to dance in these moments of ‘something happening’- moments of catching fire. Through the interface between us we participate in something that inevitably shifts because it relates, in moments of connectivity we are in a constant and infinite state of becoming something different. We are dealing with a ‘something’ that is alive, unpredictable and presents us with our selves and the other in surprising ways. We participate in an act of being critical towards the milieu we create together, and we are startled, moved, shocked and entertained.

Nicolas Bourriaud suggests that a relational practice holds an inherent critique that might suggest a wider political engagement. He asks:

‘How does it permit the development of new political and cultural designs?’ (Nicolas Bourriaud 1998: 16)

This question is definitely ‘in there’ but I will leave this one hanging for the moment.

Sum up

This practice often leaves me with a slight nausea: the condition for this work to happen at all is a willingness to become vulnerable to give up, not to know. It requires a willingness to be propelled out and out, deeply into the flesh, where something beyond ‘me’ takes place. It requires one to ‘come out and play’. It is fantastic, exhilarating, extremely complex and I would like to share it with you.

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